



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Belarus

As delivered by Deputy Permanent Representative Douglas Davidson
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 25, 2004

The United States shares the views expressed by the European Union. The Belarusian Helsinki Committee (BHC) was founded on the principles that embody this organization. The Belarusian Government's assault on the Belarusian Helsinki Committee – first by imposing onerous fines on the organization and, more recently, by pursuing criminal proceedings against Belarusian Helsinki Committee officials – reflects complete disregard for the OSCE and the universal principles of democracy and human rights upon which it stands.

The United States joins the EU in calling upon Belarus to reverse its actions against the Belarusian Helsinki Committee and its staff immediately, and to end the attacks on Belarusian civil society.

Separately, we understand Belarusian authorities are pursuing legal proceedings against Anatoly Lebedko, the Chairman of the United Civic Party and a leading democratic opposition figure, because he criticized President Lukashenko in a television interview.

Mr. Chairman, efforts to silence the political opposition are a violation of the OSCE commitments on free speech and on free and fair elections. By stepping up its attacks on civil society, the independent media and the democratic opposition, Belarus has violated its international commitments, exacerbated its relations with the United States and the international community and deepened its self-isolation.

The United States calls upon Belarus to drop its charges against Mr. Lebedko and to cease its assault on independent voices in Belarus.

Mr. Chairman, the United States and the European Union recently approached the Belarusian Government, jointly, in order to reaffirm the importance that we attach to relations with Belarus as well as our wish for Belarus to end its self-isolation. We underscored that an improvement in relations depends on the Government of Belarus making progress in upholding common values of democracy, respect for human rights, and freedom of speech. The representatives of the U.S. and EU noted in particular the importance of a free and fair process leading up to the elections in October of this year.

If Belarus is serious about improving relations with the United States and the international community, it must end its repressive policies.

